

[published IGC Magazine – March 2018]

## "That's All Folks"

By Robert Hendrickson

The early years of my career were spent at a small garden center in Illinois that became a decade of street-level experience and introduction to an industry that would become my passion.

Next were several years with a multi-million dollar per year garden center in Maryland during the Boomer spending frenzy '80s. Then a friend and I started a company creating marketing tools specially designed for garden centers. When I found myself spending less time talking to garden center owners about the products we created and more time helping them through the process of marketing and business decisions, the opportunity for a consulting business became apparent.

I was soon on my own as a full-fledged consultant with a total roster of three clients. Early in this new career my friend Fred Hicks pulled me aside at a trade show and asked if I was certain about trying to become an industry consultant. "All the large centers already use consultants," he said. "Who are you going to work with?"

"There are a lot more garden centers in this country than you few big boys," I replied.

He just smiled.

Flash forward in what seems to have been a time warp and we arrive at the present. Those three clients at the beginning grew into 130 garden centers involved in what became known as **The Group**. Wendy, my wife and business partner, often reminds me that during this industry excursion I've had a lot of birthdays... over 40 since my first garden center Spring.

She doesn't do this to make me feel old (I don't think) but to remind me that when it comes to what I believe garden centers *should* be doing instead of what many *are* doing, it's likely some people possess a different point of view. Obvious solutions to problems I see garden centers struggle with have rattled around in my head for so long I thought everyone else would be able to hear the same clatter. Unfortunately, that wasn't always the case.

My goal has always been to help garden centers develop the business side of their business, especially when it comes to more effective marketing.

### **Retail Rules of the Road:**

**"Marketing is a reminder for those who already shop with you and an invitation to those who don't."**

While my approach to marketing has been questioned by companies possessing what I refer to as the "but we're different" syndrome, there have been plenty of victories working with garden center owners open to ideas that often counter what others in the industry seem eagerly willing to accept.

I've enjoyed a gratifying experience in an industry filled with great people. Now a farm project in Missouri, a growing list of family and friends plus uncharted Maya ruins to explore hold my attention. It's time for new adventures.

Thanks to those who made my long and winding road journey possible, especially Danny, Steve and Sid. These talented people and others involved with **The Group** mean garden centers will continue to have a place they can count on when searching for help that can actually make a difference in their business. Thanks to Jeff and Cheryl at everything IGC for their friendship, support and creating an industry trade show that shouldn't be missed.

To Wendy... none of this would have been possible without you.

And a special thanks to the companies that allowed me to play a role in their progress. In the end, the really good ones made it all worthwhile.